

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District and Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District Banking Program 2009-2026

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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval for Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District (DEID) to bank its CVP and 215 Water (when available) in Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District (RRBWSD) is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation's Final Environmental Assessment (EA) Number EA-09-92, *Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District and Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District, 2009 – 2026*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Background

The State of California has historically experienced periods of drought and flooding. Water agencies continually strive to prepare for varying water supply conditions to the extent possible so that agricultural or urban water supply needs can be met regardless of the water availability conditions. The Central Valley is currently experiencing a dry year in 2009 and is coming off consecutive years of drought conditions in 2007 and 2008. In addition, the interim flows from the San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement are set to begin this year. In order to proactively offset the effects of limited Central Valley Project (CVP) contract supplies due to drought and increased releases from Friant Dam into the San Joaquin River, CVP contractors from the Friant Division need to pursue water management options in order to maximize the beneficial uses of its varied water resources. When available, this could be accomplished by having a variety of water supply options that can be implemented as needed. For instance, the ability to bank water supplies that exceed the current demand is one strategy that can be useful. The flexibility in the timing of delivery afforded by water banking would be advantageous to water agencies during the summer growing season when water demand is at its peak.

DEID has requested that Reclamation approve its desire to maximize the beneficial use of its varied water resources by banking supplies that exceed the current demand to its immediate needs in RRBWSD on an annual basis. The use of CVP and 215 Water for the purpose of groundwater banking outside its contract service area provides DEID with operational flexibility and facilitates better management of its water supply.

Findings

Water Resources

All waters introduced and conveyed through the FKC must meet Reclamation water quality standards. If through monitoring the water pumped from one or more of RRBWSD's extraction wells fail to meet the criteria for discharging groundwater into either the Cross Valley Canal (CVC) and subsequently into the Friant-Kern Canal (FKC), the water from that well will not be allowed to be introduced into either facility until subsequent testing have demonstrated that the water quality has been met by the criteria as outlined in Title 22. Likewise, the same water quality requirements will need to be met before any waters involved with the Proposed Action is

diverted into the Kern River. Therefore, there will be no significant impacts to water quality as a result of the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action will not interfere with the normal operations of any district involved with the banking program, nor will it impede any State Water Project or CVP obligations to deliver water to other contractors or to local fish and wildlife habitat. The delivery and extraction of the waters involved with the Proposed Action will occur during times when Reclamation and/or the Friant Water Authority determines that there is excess capacity in the FKC, and the Kern County Water Authority similarly determining that the CVC will be able to accommodate the additional water. The implementation of the banking program between DEID and RRBWSD will not have significant impacts on the conveyance facilities and surface water resources.

The Proposed Action will provide DEID with surface water reliability and likely decrease reliance on groundwater pumping by its landowners during drought years. The Proposed Action will result in a net increase in groundwater levels since more water would be delivered to the groundwater subbasin underlying RRBWSD than will have occurred absent the project. The banking program could result in a net increase in the Tule and Kern County Groundwater Subbasin levels underlying DEID and RRBWSD; therefore, the Proposed Action could have a beneficial impact on groundwater resources.

Land Use

DEID's water to be banked will be reregulated through RRBWSD's existing banking facilities and will not require the modification or construction of new conveyance facilities. The Proposed Action will not result in increased or decreased water supplies in DEID or NKWSD that will induce growth or land use changes as both districts are fully built out and supply no water to customers other than agricultural users. There will be no significant impacts as a result of the Proposed Action as land use will remain the same as described in the affected environment.

Biological Resources

Water demands and conditions in the project area will not change and no new facilities will be constructed, and therefore, there will be no direct effects on listed species or designated critical habitat. The waters involved with the Proposed Action will not involve the conversion of any land and would therefore not change the land use patterns of the cultivated or fallowed fields that do have some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since no natural stream courses alteration will occur, there will be no effects on listed fish species.

Cultural Resources

The banking program will be accomplished using existing facilities so there would be no new construction or ground disturbance. No new lands will be put into agricultural production as a result of the banking program; therefore, the Proposed Action involves the type of activity that has no potential to affect historic properties.

Indian Trust Assets

Approval of the banking program between DEID and RRBWSD will not involve any construction and will utilize existing conveyance facilities; therefore, activities associated with

the Proposed Action will not affect Indian Trust Assets (ITA). The nearest ITA is the Tule River Reservation approximately 23 northeast of the project location.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action will provide water supply reliability to DEID that will help to sustain existing croplands. Businesses and farm workers rely on these crops to maintain jobs.

The Proposed Action will continue to support the economic vitality in the region; therefore, there will be no impacts to socioeconomic resources.

Environmental Justice

Under the Proposed Action, the ability to manage its varied water resources will help maintain agricultural production and local employment in DEID. The Proposed Action will not affect low-income or disadvantaged populations within the districts by not causing dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease. Employment opportunities for low-income wage earners and minority population groups will be within historical conditions and disadvantaged populations will not be subject to disproportionate impacts.

Air Quality

The movement of water between DEID, RRBWSD, and other potential exchange partners will be done via gravity flow and/or pumped using electric motors which have no emissions. In addition, extraction of banked groundwater from RRBWSD's three extraction wells would be pumped using electric motors which do not emit emissions that would contribute to air quality impacts. The air quality emissions from electrical power have been considered in environmental documentation for the generating power plant. The Proposed Action will not involve any construction or land disturbing activities that could lead to fugitive dust emissions and/or exhaust emissions associated with the operations of heavy machinery.

In the event that reverse pumping in the FKC is required to return banked water to DEID, a portable diesel pump at three check structures would be required to perform such actions. If all three diesel pumps were utilized to reverse pump all of the annual return water back to DEID, its total emissions will still be well below the de minimus thresholds for the San Joaquin Valley Air Board (SJVAB); therefore, there will be no air quality impacts associated with this project.

Cumulative Impacts

The Proposed Action will maintain existing land uses and would not contribute to cumulative changes or impacts to land uses or planning. Land use trends around the action area in recent years have resulted in urbanization of agricultural lands. This trend is typically caused by economic pressure and is likely to continue with or without this banking program. Therefore, there will be no cumulative effects to land use as a result of the Proposed Action.

The groundwater extraction wells involved with this project are located within RRBWSD's existing banking facilities and will not interfere with any private wells. RRBWSD has been banking groundwater for in-district use for over 40 years. Groundwater levels in the area will also slightly increase since some of the water banked would be left behind for recharge purposes. In addition, the groundwater level underlying DEID could experience a beneficial cumulative impact over the course of this project because landowners in DEID will need to rely less on

groundwater pumping during dry years. The Proposed Action when added to other similar current and proposed actions may result in beneficial cumulative impacts to the groundwater on a small scale.

As in the past, hydrological conditions and other factors are likely to result in fluctuating water supplies and this drives requests for water service actions such as water banking. Water districts aim to provide water to their customers based on available water supplies and timing, all while attempting to minimize costs. Farmers irrigate and grow crops based on these conditions and factors, and a myriad of water service actions are approved and executed each year to facilitate water needs. Each water service transaction involving Reclamation undergoes environmental review prior to approval. Due to the general nature of water banking, the project will have no adverse impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable.